

83
THE
SUBSTANCE
OF A
SERMON,
PREACHED AT BALTIMORE,
IN THE STATE OF MARYLAND,
BEFORE THE
GENERAL CONFERENCE
OF THE
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH,
On the 27th of DECEMBER, 1784,
AT THE
ORDINATION
OF THE
Rev. FRANCIS ASBURY,
TO THE OFFICE OF A
SUPERINTENDENT.

BY THOMAS COKE, D.D.
SUPERINTENDENT of the said CHURCH.

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THE
SUBSTANCES
OF A
SERMON
PREACHED AT BALTIMORE
IN THE STATE OF MARYLAND



ROBERT A. L. A. S. B. U. R. G. E. N. T.
BY
T. J. M. A. S. O. N. S. O. N. S.

T O T H E
Rev. FRANCIS ASBURY,
SUPERINTENDENT

O F T H E
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

I N
A M E R I C A,

T H I S
S E R M O N

I S I N S C R I B E D

B Y

HIS MOST AFFECTIONATE BROTHER,

THOMAS COKE.

BALTIMORE, MARCH 1, 1785.



SUBSTANCE OF A SERMON,
PREACHED AT BALTIMORE.

REVELATIONS iii. 7—11.

To the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia, write, These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the Key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth. I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my Name. Behold, I will make them of the Synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my Patience, I also will keep thee from the Hour of Temptation, which shall come upon all the World, to try them that dwell upon the Earth. Behold, I come quickly, hold fast that which thou hast, that no Man take thy Crown.

THE most important part of a Minister's duty, is to insist on the great, fundamental Truths of Christianity. But he is called occasionally to consider subjects, of a more confined and peculiar nature; and the intention of the present meeting more especially requires such an attempt.

I shall therefore, with the Assistance and Blessing of GOD,

In the first place, vindicate our conduct in the present instance.

Secondly, Open the words of my Text:

And thirdly, Delineate the character of a Christian Bishop.

The Church of *England*, of which the Society of Methodists, in general, have till lately professed themselves a part, did for many years groan in *America* under grievances of the heaviest kind. Subjected to a Hierarchy, which weighs every thing in the scales of politics, its most important interests were repeatedly sacrificed to the supposed advantages of *England*. The Churches were, in general, filled with the parasites and bottle-companions of the rich and the great. The humble and most importunate entreaties of the oppressed flocks, yea, the representations of a General Assembly itself,* were contemned and despised; every thing sacred must lie down at the feet of a party, the holiness and happiness of mankind be sacrificed to their views; and the drunkard, the fornicator, and the extortioner, triumphed over bleeding *Zion*, because they were faithful abettors of the ruling powers. But these intolerable fetters are now struck off, and the antichristian union which before subsisted between Church and State, is broken asunder. One happy consequence of which has been the expulsion of most of

* The Assembly of *Virginia*.

those hirelings,† who ate the fat and clothed themselves with the wool but strengthened not the diseased, neither healed that which was sick, neither bound up that which was broken, neither brought again that which was driven away, neither sought that which was lost.‡

The Parochial Churches in general being hereby vacant, our People were deprived of the Sacraments through the greatest part of these States, and continue so still. What method can we take at this critical juncture? GOD has given us sufficient resources in ourselves, and, after mature deliberation, we believe that we are called to draw them forth.

“ But what right have you to Ordain?” The same right as most of the Reformed Churches in Christendom: Our Ordination, in its lowest view, being equal to any of the Presbyterian, as originating with three Presbyters of the Church of England.

“ But what right have you to exercise the *Episcopal Office*?” To me the most manifest and clear. GOD has been pleased by Mr. *Wesley*, to raise up in *America* and *Europe* a numerous Society, well known by the name of *Methodists*. The whole body have invariably esteemed *this Man* as their chief Pastor, under CHRIST. He has constantly appointed all their religious officers from

† I am deeply conscious that the observation by no means reaches to the *whole* body of the Clergy of the Church of England. There are many of them, whose characters I greatly esteem, and at whose feet I should think it an honour to sit.

‡ *Ezek. xxxiv. 3, 4.*

he highest to the lowest, by himself or his Delegate. And we are fully persuaded, there is no Church-Office which he judges expedient for the welfare of the People entrusted to his charge, but, as *essential* to his station, he has a power to ordain. After long deliberation, he saw it his duty to form his Society in *America* into an independent Church; but he loved the most excellent Liturgy of the *Church of England*, he loved its rights and ceremonies, and therefore adopted them in most instances for the present case.

Besides, in addition to this, we have every qualification for an Episcopal Church, which that of *Alexandria* (a Church of no small note in the primitive times) possessed for two hundred years. Our Bishops, or *Superintendents* (as we rather call them) having been elected or received by the suffrages of the whole body of our Ministers through the *Continen'*, assembled in General Conference.

“ But don't you break the succession?” The uninterrupted succession of Bishops is a point that has been long given up by the ablest *Protestant* Defenders of Episcopacy. Bishop *Hoadley* himself, in his celebrated Controversy with Dr. *Calamy*, allows it to be unnecessary. His words are, “ To the thirteenth question I answer, that I think not an *uninterrupted line of succession* of regularly ordained *Bishops* necessary.”|| He also grants the authenticity of the anecdote given us by St. *Ferome*, which informs us that the Church of *Alexandria* mentioned above, had no regular succession from the time of St. *Mark* the Evangelist, the first Bishop

of that Church, to the time of *Dionysius*, a space of two hundred years: but the *College of Presbyters* on the death of a Bishop, elected another in his stead. We are also informed from the Epistle of *St. Clement* to the *Corinthians*, § written soon after the death of *St. Paul*,—a writer whose works are next in precedence to the canon of Scripture, and probably written by immediate inspiration—that the Church of *Corinth* was then governed by a *College of Presbyters*. And from the Epistle of *St. Polycarp* to the Church of *Philippi*, ¶ written in the year of our Lord 116, we also find that the *Christian Philippians* were then governed only by a *College of Presbyters*. So that the Primitive Christians were so far from esteeming the *regular succession* as essential to the constitution of a Christian Church, that in some instances *Episcopacy itself* was wholly omitted.

But of all the forms of Church-Government, we think a *moderate* Episcopacy the best. The executive power being lodged in the hands of one, or at least a few, vigour and activity are given to the resolves of the body, and those two essential requisites for any grand undertaking are sweetly united—calmness and wisdom in deliberating; and in the executive department, expedition and force.

“ But are you not *schismatics* by your separation from the Church?” A *Christian Church* is a *Body of Professors*, who hold the *Fundamentals* of the Christian Religion in *Doctrine* and *Practice*.

§ *Clem. Ep. I. Sect. 43, 47, 54, 57. p. 172, 174, 177, 178.*

¶ *Polycarp. ad Philip. Salutat. Sect. 5, 6, 11. p. 186, 188. 189.*

But we are not ignorant,—we *cannot* be ignorant, that the chief part of the Clergy and Members of the *Church of England* (so called) do either tacitly or explicitly deny the doctrine of *Justification by Faith, the Knowledge of Salvation by the Remission of Sins, and the Witness of the Spirit of GOD*,—points which we esteem *most fundamental*, yea, *essentially* necessary to constitute a Child of GOD. We are not,—we *cannot* be ignorant, that they justify as innocent, many of the criminal pleasures of the world,—card-playing, dancing, theatrical amusements, &c.—pleasures utterly inconsistent with union and communion with GOD. And, though we admire their *Liturgy*, and are determined to *retain* it with a few alterations,—we cannot, we WILL NOT hold connexion with them, till the Holy Spirit of GOD has made them see and *feel* the evil of the practices, and the importance of the doctrines mentioned above. And for *this schism* (if it must have the name) we are cheerfully ready to answer at the Bar of GOD.

“ Why then did you not separate before?” It has long been the desire of the majority of the Preachers and People. But they submitted to the superior judgment of Mr. *Wesley*, who, till the Revolution, doubted the propriety of the step.

“ But did not your Preachers constantly exhort the People to attend the service of the *Church of England*?” In the general they did, from a full persuasion, drawn from experience, that we had no other alternative to preserve our Society, but an adherence to the *Church of England*, which was totally destitute of real discipline, or a formation of ourselves into an independent Church; and
some

some of them, perhaps, did this with a degree of imprudence, which I cannot defend.

But I proceed to open my Text.

[*To the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia, write.*] It is evident to every discerning reader, that the words *Bishop, Elder, Overseer, &c.* are synonymous terms throughout the writings of *St. Paul*. Nor do I recollect a single instance in the New Testament, where any peculiar title is given to the superior officers of the Church (such as were *Timothy* and *Titus*) except in the Epistles of our LORD to the seven Churches of *Asia*, where they are distinguished by the name of *Angel*—the prime *Messengers* of CHRIST to his Churches. *St. John* wrote the Revelation in the isle of *Patmos*, near the close of his life, when the Gospel had gained considerable ground in the world, and many numerous societies of Christians had been formed. Among the principal of these were the seven Churches of *Asia*, which were evidently (what we now call) *Episcopal* Churches. For it will hardly admit of a doubt, but these capital societies had in each of them a College of Presbyters. And had these been all on an equality, our LORD would never have directed these Epistles respectively to a *single Angel*. And *all of them* being *thus* addressed, we have reasonable ground to presume that the Churches in general, even before the death of *St. John*, were of the *Episcopal* order. And of how great importance must the office of *these Angels* have been, when the LORD addressed himself *only* to them, as if the welfare of their respective Churches entirely depended on them!

[*These*

[*These things, saith he that is holy, he that is true*]—who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with approbation, and delights in Sincerity and Truth—the everlasting Fountain of Truth and Holiness, who therefore demands the deepest attention.

[*He that hath the Key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth.*] In allusion to the governor of a city, who has the full command of the gates thereof; so has the LORD JESUS, of whom *David* was a type, over the *New Jerusalem*, to open it to the faithful, and shut it against all that defile.

[*I know thy works.*] I am acquainted with all thy gracious tempers, thy fervent zeal, thine abundant labours, for the welfare of my Church and the Glory of my Name.

[*Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.*] I have indulged thy fervent spirit, have enlarged thy circle of action, and will so clothe thee with my strength, that no power upon earth shall be able to restrain thee in thy glorious course.

[*For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my Word, and hast not denied my Name.*] Thou hast a little measure of the Divine Power within thee, and hast been a faithful steward of it. Thou hast confessed my Name before this wicked generation, and borne a faithful Testimony to the word of my Truth.

[*Behold, I will make them of the Synagogue of Satan (who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie)*]

lie) behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.] Those who despise thee, who pretend to be of the true Circumcision, but are the greatest enemies of the *real* Circumcision of the Heart, I will bring them to thy feet, and compel them to acknowledge that thou art my Beloved, and that I have honoured thee. How high was this excellent man in the esteem of his LORD! And how ought the recollection of this, to kindle every spark of holy ambition in the faithful Superintendents of his Church!

[Because thou hast kept the word of my Patience, I also will keep thee from the Hour of Temptation which shall come upon all the World, to try them that dwell upon the Earth.] Because thou hast been faithful, and hast endured hardship, and followed me, I will hide thee under the covert of my wings from all the judgments and calamities which I will inflict on mankind, to try them, and sift them, and separate the faithful from the wicked.

[Behold, I come quickly, hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy Crown.] I shall soon appear, to bestow on thee thy glorious Reward—that peculiar Crown which I have reserved for my beloved Servant, who, through my Grace, has been so faithful a co-worker with me in my great plan of general happiness. Therefore hold fast thy Love, thy Zeal, thine important Activity, that no man step into thy place, before the work I have given thee to do, be finished, and take *thy* Crown—the exceeding weight of Glory which I have kept for thee in store.

Having

Having just touched on the general character of this amiable Bishop* of the Church of *Philadelphia*, as displayed in my Text, which, had it been the Will of GOD, we could wish to have seen at fuller length, I proceed to consider the grand characteristics of a *Christian Bishop*.

1. His *Humility*. This is the *Preservatrix Virtutum*, the guard of every other Grace. As some one beautifully observes, other Graces, without Humility, are like a fine powder in the wind without a cover. Let a man be ever so zealous, ever so laborious, yet if he wants Humility, he will be only like *Penelope* with her web in the ancient fable, undoing at one time what he does at another. There is something interwoven with human nature, which immediately recoils at the very appearance of Pride. But *this man* is clothed with Humility. When no other grace shines forth, still we discern this beautiful vail. We give him credit for every thing. And when, in spite of all his caution, some hidden gem peeps out, it sparkles with redoubled lustre. But, above all, he is a vessel fit for his Master's use. His eye is single, he moves directly on; his only desire is to glorify GOD and benefit Mankind, yea, he lives for no other end. He is "in a straight betwixt two, having a desire to depart and be with CHRIST," and at the same time a fervent desire to be a Blessing to his Fellow-Creatures. "He is crucified to the world, and the world to him." And his soul disentangled from every selfish view, and emptied of every selfish desire, is a fit receptacle of all the divine gifts which GOD is willing to

* I here use the word *Bishop* in its present sense, as signifying an Officer of the Church superior to the Presbyters.

bestow.

bestow. He continually lies at the feet of his LORD, and the language of his heart is, "Not unto me, not unto me, but unto thy Name, O JEHOVAH, be all the Praise!"

Flow back the rivers to the sea,
And let my all be lost in THEE.

There is no impediment in his soul to the divine operations. He is as the *clay* in the hand of the Potter, as the *pen* in the hand of the ready Writer. His humble spirit simply enquires into the Will of its GOD, and when *that* is discovered, confers no longer with flesh and blood, but fulfils it with the most entire resignation and great delight.

2. His *Meekness*. This is a *passive* Grace. It is the sacred ballast of the soul—that evenness, that divine serenity of spirit which "is not provoked," which nothing can move to wrath—that *Moderation* spoken of by St. Paul, which harmonizes all the passions, and holds every power of the heart in sweet subjection—it ties them all to the horns of the Altar. In this the *Christian* Bishop eminently shines. Amidst all the contradictions of sinners, and the provoking of tongues, he still retains his gracious temper, and discovers no emotion but that of Pity and Compassion—all is Softness, all is Love. This is the *quiet Spirit*, whose price is great in the sight of GOD.† It is the Spirit of the LAMB, whose voice was not heard in the streets; who was oppressed and afflicted, yea, was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. O how

† 1 Pet. iii. 4.

contrary to the spirit of the meek and lowly JESUS, is the turbulence and violence of many, who call themselves the Ministers of CHRIST. "But the sheep will flee from such, for they know not their voice."

3. His *Gentleness*. This is an *active* Grace, which flows out in the converse and the carriage. It is Christian Courtesy. This also the *Christian* Bishop possesses in a high degree. "Grace is poured into his lips," for "out of the fulness of his LORD he receiveth Grace for Grace." Nothing that is *grating* drops from his mouth. His very reproofs are dipt in oil. How insinuating is all his language, while the hearer hangs upon his tongue! His words "drop like the gentle rain from Heaven upon the place beneath." His looks, and every gesture, and every feature, beam forth Love. This is a key to open hearts with. What an amazing field of action does this engaging temper, accompanied by the Blessing of GOD, gradually open to his zealous soul? He makes Religion appear amiable even in the judgment of the world itself. And excepting when employed in the severer duties of his function, he knows nothing of the pain of *giving pain*.

4. His *Patience*. This is the Grace that "endures all things,"—that flows out in sufferings and trials, and bears up the soul under every difficulty!—*sub pondere crescit*. The more 'tis exercised, the stronger it grows. Let us view the *Christian* Bishop in this respect. Behold, with what a steady pace he moves!—Equally unshaken by the smiles or frowns of men, he gently moves along, like a mighty river, that bears down all before it, and yet waters every fertile meadow
on

on its sides. His great *Zerubbabel* proceeds before him, and every mountain drops into a plain. His soul "looks to JESUS, who endured the Cross, despising the shame," and earnestly endeavours

To trace *his* example, the world to disdain,
And constantly trample on pleasure and pain.

He smiles at persecution, and thanks his GOD for the opportunity of displaying an example to the world of the Religion he proclaims. Thus does he go on, till he has finished the work which GOD has given him to do. And when the organs of his body have been weakened and enervated by the diseases which sooner or later assault the mortal frame, he still puts forth his little strength for the glorious cause in which he has been so long engaged, till having "fought the good fight, and finished his course," he drops asleep in the arms of his GOD.

5. His *Fortitude*. His soul is far above the fear of temporal dangers. He possesses this Cardinal Virtue in all its strength and vigour. He "adds to his Faith, *Courage*."† And though it is so divinely tempered by all the softer passions, as to be hid to all but the discerning eye, when not drawn out to action; yet *there* it ever resides, even in his inmost soul, like an iron pillar strong. But when the Church, which he fosters in his anxious bosom, is in danger, he always steps out the foremost. He stands in the front of the battle, and endeavours to receive *himself* all the fire of the enemy. Like a faithful Shepherd he steps between

† 2 Pct. i. 5.

the wolf and the sheep, and is perfectly willing to lay down his life for their sake. If you touch the Church of God, you touch the apple of his eye. And though he is not entirely ignorant of the value of his life and labours, yet when the cause of Zion calls him forth, "he mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted, neither turneth he back from the sword:" he beholds his once-suffering, but now exalted SAVIOUR. He looks up to the noble army of Martyrs, "the cloud of witnesses," and follows their glorious track,

Pain, want defies; enjoys disgrace;
Glories at dissolution near.

6. His *Impartiality*. This is the *rarest* of all the Virtues, and yet one of the most important for a Ruler of the Church. There is nothing more intolerable to mankind than *Partiality* in him that governs; and it always springs in part from a meanness and baseness of mind. It meets with such immediate and effectual resistance, that all the reins of discipline are dropt, and the vineyard of the LORD thrown open to every beast of prey. But the *Christian Bishop* is "without partiality and without hypocrisy." He moves by equal rules. He seeks not the praise of men, but serveth the LORD CHRIST. He meets with the constant and *effectual* support of those whom only he esteems—the upright and the good. And when the welfare of the Church demands the separation of a rotten member, however rich, however honourable, however powerful, he clothes himself with the dignity of his office, and executes the Will of GOD.

7. His

7. *His Zeal.* In this he is eminent indeed. For though it is softened and corrected by the other Graces, yet it wraps up his heart in the interests of *Zion*, and "the zeal of the LORD's House eats him up." He pants for the conversion of the whole world, and cries out with the souls under the altar, "How long, O LORD?" How far does his rapid spirit rise above the honours, the riches and the pleasures of the world! He leaves them at a distance behind. His whole attention is swallowed up by greater things than these. Whilst the men of the world are variously employed in the pursuit of earthly objects, he endeavours, in the SPIRIT of his LORD, to extract honey out of every flower, good out of every evil. He watches the opportunity, runs through every open door, and "spends, and is spent," for the good of mankind.

8. *His Wisdom.* This reigns over all his soul. He is prepared for it by the GOD of *Nature*, and endued with it by the GOD of *Grace*. He was born to govern. He is "as wise as a serpent." His eye continually pervades the whole circle of his work, and yet who so *blind* as he? He is all ear, and yet none is so deaf. He sets his feet in the centre of his sphere, and feels the smallest motion through every parallel. He knows with clear precision, when to speak, and when to be silent; when to move, and when to be still; when to parry, and when to thrust. He has a quick discernment of men and manners; but he "lays hands *suddenly* on no man." His choice of labourers proceeds from the ripest judgment, and

from the clearest evidence that can be procured. He feels all the strength of his resources, as if they were wholly centered in himself, and knows how and when to draw them forth. He is acquainted with the various views, the knowledge, the situation, the circumstances and the wishes of the people; and the various gifts, graces, and abilities of the pastors. He makes them all to *tally*. He brings out all his force against the common enemy, he spreads out all his sails to every favourable wind, he keeps in motion every wheel of the machine, and uses to the uttermost every person and every thing within his power, for the Glory of GOD and the prosperity of his Church.

9. *His Communion with GOD and Confidence in him.* These support him under all his trials. He lives within the vail. His soul cleaves to GOD; and he waters all his endeavours with fervent prayers. He bears upon the altar of his heart the interests of the Church of CHRIST, and sends them up to the Throne of Grace with all the sacred fervour of devotion. He spreads out all his hopes and all his fears before his GOD, and "makes all his requests known unto him;" and then returns to his labours with cheerfulness and vigour. He "walks with GOD," and moves with a full confidence and divine assurance of success, so far as the means he uses can answer the *great end* of every thing he does,—the Glory of GOD and the good of mankind.

Lastly.—*His Seriousness.* Though he lies at the feet of all the lovers of JESUS, yet he never debases himself. He knows his station, and "magnifies his office." The enemies of GOD may fear and hate him, but they cannot despise him. No
lightness

lightness of spirit is observable in him; all is dignity as well as love. The company of the greatest upon earth, affects him not. He lives in the presence of his Master, and says nothing but what is becoming the audience-chamber of the King of Kings.

O what a blessing to the world is the man who answers this description—"a polished shaft in the quiver" of GOD, "a burning and a shining light!" His spices are continually perfuming the place where he is,§ and "rivers of living water flow out of his belly"¶ for the benefit of all amongst whom he sojourns. When he visits a people, he comes "in the fulness of the Blessing of the Gospel, and his Master's feet are heard behind him." He husbands every golden moment, picks up every fragment of time, and devotes his little all to the service of his LORD. He looks with the deepest contempt on filthy lucre, and is perfectly satisfied with the "Riches of CHRIST."

"O thou Lover of Souls, who willest not the death of a sinner, have pity on the world. Remember *Calvary*, hear the pleading Intercessor, and raise up men after thine own heart, full of the HOLY GHOST, full of Love and full of Zeal. Guide them by thy Spirit, accompany them with thine Omnipotence, that they may tread down the Kingdom of Satan under their feet, and on its ruins build up thy glorious Church."

You may now easily perceive the dreadful effects of raising immoral or unconverted men to

§ *Cant.* iv. 16.

¶ *John* vii. 38.

the government of the Church. The baneful influence of their example is so extensive, that all the skill and cruelty of Devils can hardly fabricate a greater curse than *an irreligious Bishop*.

But, "O thou Man of GOD, follow after Righteousness, Godliness, Faith, Love, Patience and Meekness. Be thou an example to the Believers, in Word, in Conversation, in Charity, in Spirit, in Faith, in Purity. Keep that which is committed to thy trust. Be not thou ashamed of the Testimony of our LORD, but be thou a partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel, according to the Power of GOD. Endure hardship as a good Soldier of JESUS CHRIST. Do the work of an Evangelist, and make full proof of thy Ministry." And thy GOD will open to thee a wide door indeed, which all thine enemies shall not be able to shut. He will carry his Gospel under thy direction from sea to sea, yea, perhaps, from one end of the Continent to the other. Only feel thine importance, and feel thy danger, and let "not the foot of Pride come against thee;" but preserve thyself in all Humility, and Chastity, and holy Love, and thou shalt be a Vessel of Gold in the Sanctuary of GOD, thou shalt bring millions to Righteousness immediately or remotely, and shalt shine in Glory as a Star of the first magnitude for ever and ever. * FE63

"O thou who art the HOLY ONE and the TRUE, consecrate this thy Servant with the Fire of Divine Love, separate him for the most glorious purposes, make him a Star in thine own right hand, and fulfil in him and by him all the good Pleasure of thy Goodness.

* *Dan. xii. 3.*

F I N I S.

